

poor Things, but before he could say any of this, there was a knock on the door.

"Lunchy?" came old Specs's voice from outside in the corridor.

At once, Lunch Box slammed her lid shut, leaving Jack and the pig squashed together in the dark with the inhaler.

"Yes?" they heard Lunch Box say in a quavering voice.

"Good news. You're being Adjusted!"

"Oh," came Lunch Box's muffled voice. "Um . . . wonderful."

"You all right, dearie? You don't sound that pleased."

"No, I . . . I am. I'll just—I'll just miss you, Specs."

"Well, now," said the sheriff, sounding touched. "Ain't that sweet! But you'd better hurry! The Adjustment Team's running late!"

The lunch box's lid was a little bit warped, which was lucky as it let in enough air for Jack to breathe, not to mention a tiny ray of light. Squashed together inside the dark tin, Jack and the Christmas Pig felt the lunch box hopping downstairs into the bar.

Lunchy's tin bottom made such a racket crossing the wooden floor that Jack felt safe to whisper to the Christmas Pig, who still had his trotters clamped over the inhaler's mouth, "There was no need to threaten her like that!"

"D'you want to find DP, or not?"

"Of course I do," said Jack, "but you were horrible!"

"Says the boy who tried to pull off my head," said the Christmas Pig.

"Stop going on about that! I've *said* I'm sorry!"

The lunch box kept bouncing along, and Jack knew they'd reached the street when they heard the penknife's voice, quite close by. "You there, Lunch Box—you ride in my wagon, as you're biggest. Here, Chisel—help her up."

"No, no, I can manage!" said Lunch Box, sounding scared. Jack guessed she didn't want any of the Loss Adjusters to feel how heavy she was, when she was only supposed to have an inhaler inside her. She made several little jumps, then finally managed to land with a clunk inside the wooden wagon.

"Sorry I'm late!" came a new voice. "I'm so pleased to be going! Not that you haven't been kind, Specs—*very* kind—but I won't miss sharing a room with Hanky. He hasn't washed since he got here."

"Poor fella," said the sheriff sadly. "He's given up. Some Things do, when they haven't been found for years. Well, good luck, Pokey! Goodbye, Fingers! Goodbye, Lunchy! We'll miss you!"

"So long, Specs," called Penknife. "Mind you contact Captures about those toys, now!"

The wooden wagon moved off. Jack could hear the footsteps of the two heavy elephants crunching in the snow, the buzz of the clockwork mouse, and the occasional yap of the fuzzy dog.

"I'm going to let go of you now," the Christmas Pig whispered to the inhaler. "But if you scream or give us away, we'll make sure you get thrown onto the Wastes with us!"

The inhaler gave a little puff, which seemed to be her way of agreeing, and the Christmas Pig let her go. She drew a long wheezy breath, then whispered, "You're both very rude and nasty, but it's also nice to see something apart from the inside of this tin, so hello and welcome."

The three carriages moved on for what felt like at least an hour, and Jack was getting quite tired of the smell of egg sandwiches, when they heard a voice from up ahead.

"HALT!"

The wooden wagon trundled to a stop. Jack and the Christmas Pig looked at each other and Jack could tell from the expression in the pig's

little black plastic eyes that he, too, was scared.

"Documents!" said a rasping voice.

They heard the shuffling of papers.

"One Pokémon card, Pokey, owner's realized could be valuable—check," said the cruel voice. "One gardening glove, Fingers, owner can't find new ones as comfortable—check. One lunch box, Lunchy, owner's remembered there's an inhaler inside her."

Something banged hard on the side of Lunch Box, who let out a yelp of pain.

"You in there, Inhaler?" snarled the voice.

"Yes!" called the inhaler.

"Check," said the cruel voice. "All right, you can proceed. Keep your eyes peeled, though, Penknife. We're on high alert. I s'pose you've heard there's some Thing down here that shouldn't be?"

"Yes. Any description yet?" asked Penknife.

"Not yet," said the cruel voice. "But I've never seen the Loser so angry."

"You've seen him?" said Penknife nervously.

"Oh yes," said the cruel voice. "He told me, 'The night for miracles and lost causes won't last forever. Once it's over, finders keepers.'"

"What does that mean?" asked Penknife.

"No idea," snarled the cruel voice. "Just keep watch for any Thing acting strangely!"

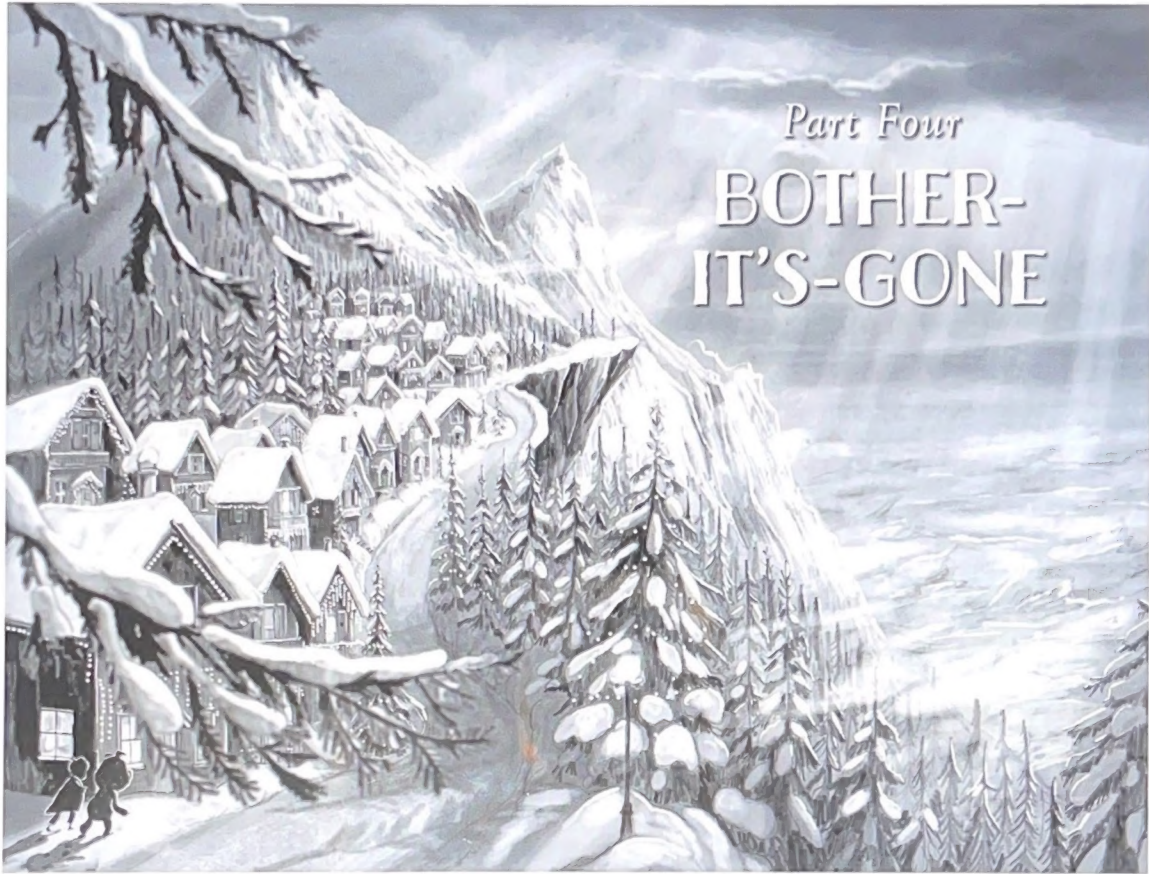
With that, the wooden cart rolled on again.

"He *dented* me," Lunchy complained to Penknife.

"Well, that's Hammer for you," said Penknife. "Never looks when he can bash!" He raised his voice to address all three passengers. "You lot

might as well get comfy and sleep, if you can. We've got a long way to go."

The cart now started to move uphill. Jack, who found himself forced to the back of the lunch box, managed to curl up in a corner, wrapped in the blanket he'd brought from Disposable, with his face lying against the Christmas Pig's soft head. It wasn't at all like curling up with DP, but it was comfier than leaning against the cold tin wall.





BOTHER-IT'S-GONE

Jack jerked awake. Something soft was prodding him, and after a moment, he realized it was the Christmas Pig's trotter again. The cart was still moving. A ray of bright light was falling through the dent in Lunchy's lid. Inhaler was still fast asleep, making little wheezy noises.

"Time to get out!" the Christmas Pig whispered in Jack's ear. "Penknife's just said we're nearly at Bother-It's-Gone! We'll slip out of Lunchy, then jump off the back of the cart."

"What if we're spotted?"

"Well, then, we'll just have to run as fast as we can. Ready?"

"All right," whispered Jack, suddenly very scared.

"Lunchy?" said the Christmas Pig, prodding her side. "Are you awake?"

"Yes," she whispered back.

"Let us out, please, and don't forget: if you tell anyone you saw us, we'll tell them you helped us!"

Lunchy's lid clicked open. Clutching his belly to stop the sound of his beans giving them away, the Christmas Pig climbed out of the lunch box into the bright sunshine and Jack followed, leaving Inhaler snoozing behind them.

Luckily, the wooden cart was last in the line of vehicles, and as Penknife, who was driving, had his back to them, nobody saw Jack and the Christmas Pig emerge from the tin.

"I know you didn't want to help, but thanks all the same, Lunchy!" the Christmas Pig whispered, and he patted her gently on the lid.

"You were very rude," the lunch box whispered back, "but I hope the Loser doesn't get you. Good luck!"

Slowly and carefully, Jack and the Christmas Pig climbed over the back of the wooden cart, let themselves fall into the soft snow, then darted out of sight behind a clump of fir trees beside the trail.

Looking around, Jack saw that the cart had taken them to the top of a mountain, from which they could look down on the wide stretches of the Wastes of the Unlamented. Disposable was no longer visible, nor could Jack see anything moving on the Wastes. He supposed the Loser had eaten all the latest arrivals, unless the poor Things were hiding in clumps of thistles.

Turning to watch the three carriages, he saw them disappear into the town, which was perched on the very top of the mountain. A glossy painted sign near Jack and the Christmas Pig's hiding place gleamed in the sunlight. On it were written the words: WELCOME TO BOTHER-IT'S-GONE.

"We'll wait 'til they're out of sight," said the Christmas Pig. "Then sneak into town and try and find a toy who might know DP..."

Once the carriages had disappeared, they hurried up the trail and into Bother-It's-Gone.

The new town was nothing like Disposable. Everything was clean and well tended. The snow-covered houses were all as snug, neat, and pretty as if they were made of gingerbread, their front doors painted in different colors. The roads had been swept clear, and multicolored Christmas lights were gleaming in more fir trees.

In spite of being cold and shivery in his pajamas, Jack felt his spirits rise. He could just imagine DP living in one of these little houses. It definitely seemed like a place where Things that were loved would be sent.

"Let's try this way," said the Christmas Pig, pointing up a side street.

It really was the prettiest little town Jack had ever seen. Through the snowy windows of the houses, he glimpsed roaring fires and cuckoo clocks, thick rugs and comfy armchairs. The Things they passed—a school tie and some exercise books, a fountain pen and an old button—looked far more cheerful than those back in Disposable. Jack was sure these Things must be valued Up There in the Land of the Living, to have been sent to live in such a nice, cozy place, yet he couldn't see any toys.

Finally, he spotted a black chess piece, who was standing talking to a large old-fashioned address book, whose cover was decorated with roses.

"Let's ask the chess piece if he's seen DP!" Jack said to the Christmas Pig.

"Hmm," said the Christmas Pig. "I'm not sure. A chess piece isn't really a toy."

"He's the closest Thing we've seen," said Jack.

"Well, all right," said the Christmas Pig. "But don't—"

“—mention having a cartoon, I know, I know!” said Jack.

So they drew into a doorway to wait for the chess piece and the address book’s conversation to end.

“. . . in *five minutes’ time*, Mr. Knight, all right?” the address book was saying, in a voice that rang all the way down the street. “*Naughty* Mr. Knight, I shan’t let you miss another one! We’re starting in the Main Square and I *won’t* take no for an answer! The tour will finish up at the Town Hall, where the mayor’s most *graciously* agreed to show us round! Five minutes, Mr. Knight, don’t forget or I’ll be very upset!”

Laughing gaily, the address book bustled off, leaving the chess piece behind. As soon as she’d disappeared, the chess piece started to hop off in the other direction, going so fast that Jack and the Christmas Pig had to run to catch up.

“Excuse me?” said Jack.

“Yes?” panted the chess piece, coming to a halt. His top part was shaped like a horse’s head.

“Have you seen a toy pig?” asked Jack. “He’s about the same size as this pig, but he’s grayish, his ears are wonky, and his eyes are buttons.”

“No, haven’t seen any pig like that. You don’t get a lot of toys in Both-er-It’s-Gone,” said the chess piece. “Now excuse me, please, I’m trying not to get roped into another one of Addie’s tours.”

With these words, he gave a little whinny and hopped off again, disappearing into one of the snow-topped chalets and slamming the door behind him.



ADDIE THE ADDRESS BOOK

Jack was very disappointed to hear that there weren't many toys in Bother-It's-Gone. Where could DP have been sent, then? But before he and the Christmas Pig could discuss it, a loud whistle made them both jump. Jack was scared the whistle was some kind of alarm to tell the citizens of Bother-It's-Gone that some Thing was there that shouldn't be. However, the whistle was followed by the unmistakable sound of a steam train approaching.

"Interesting," said the Christmas Pig, wrinkling up his snout again. "Where's the train come from? Let's go and have a look."

So Jack and the Christmas Pig hurried off in the direction of the train noises, and were just in time to see it arrive in a little station in the middle of town. The train was royal blue and gold, and once it had chugged to a halt in another cloud of steam, the doors opened and several Things tumbled out, including a gold wristwatch, a silver cup, and a bronze medal trailing a frayed ribbon.

"Look, it's her again," said the Christmas Pig, pointing a trotter. "That address book."

Sure enough, there she stood with her rose-patterned cover, handwritten pages swishing away the steam from the train.

She spoke at the top of her voice, as before. "How *wonderful* to see you all! You're in luck! *Just* in time for one of Addie's famous walking tours! *Such* a wonderful way to find out all about Bother-It's-Gone! Follow me, follow me, do!"

Jack could tell the new Things thought they had to do as Addie said, even though she wasn't wearing a Loss Adjuster's hat, and so they fell into step behind her.

"I think we should follow," said the Christmas Pig, "and try and find out where that train came from—but let's be careful. There's something about that address book I don't like."

So they followed Addie and the Things that had just come off the train to a little square, where a further collection of Things was waiting for the start of the tour. Jack saw the Pokémon card, Fingers, and Lunchy among them, all looking cheerful now that they'd seen what a pretty little town they'd come to live in.

"Allow me to introduce myself!" cried Addie, rustling to the front of the crowd. "My full name's Address Book, but you must call me Addie! As a *long*-standing resident of Bother-It's-Gone, and a *close* personal friend of the dear mayor, I like to conduct these little tours, to help

everyone feel at home! Follow me, please, and if you've got any questions, don't *hesitate* to ask!"

She bustled off up a new street and everyone followed. Jack and the Christmas Pig found themselves walking beside the gold watch they'd just seen get off the train.

"Just arrived?" asked the watch as he wriggled along.

"Yes," said the Christmas Pig.

"Didn't see you on the train."

"No," said the Christmas Pig. "We were Adjusted from Disposable."

"Ah," said Watch. "That would explain it."

The wristwatch had words engraved on his back, Jack noticed: *To Bob, with love, from Betty.*

"Are you looking at my inscription?" the watch asked Jack.

"Um—yes," said Jack, hoping it wasn't rude to look at a Thing's inscription.

"Huh," sighed the wristwatch. "Well, Betty and Bob don't love each other anymore, I know that much. The moment they told me I was being Adjusted, I thought 'they've split up.' Solid gold, I am, and Bob was very upset when he first lost me. But something must have changed, Up There. Bob clearly doesn't miss me as much as he did at first, or they wouldn't have made me move out of—"

"No talking at the back there!" cried Addie. "Or you won't get the full benefit of my tour! Now, we're just passing a *rather* nice chalet, one of the best in town—and it so happens to be mine!" she said, with a peal of laughter. "And here to our left, the residence of a *rather* charming silver-plated bookmark. So important to have well-bred, well-read neighbors! The previous occupant was a grubby old school timetable!" she added, with a shudder. "*What* a dreadful impression it gave newcomers, to see *him* as soon as they arrived!"

"Now, for those of you who've come here straight from Misland," Addie went on, leading them round a corner, "I should explain that there are two towns in the Land of the Lost: Disposable and Bother-It's-Gone!"

The hands on the watch's face bunched up at these words, giving him a puzzled expression.

"No, madam," he called out to Addie, from the back of the crowd, "I think you've been misinformed. Medal, Cup, and I were sent here from —"

"*There are only two towns in the Land of the Lost!*" cried Addie, coming to a sudden halt and wheeling about to face the crowd, who all stopped so abruptly that some of them bumped into one another, and the silver cup toppled over and had to be helped upright again by a pair of furry mittens.

"*Two towns!*" repeated Addie, glowering around at them all. "One for the Good Things and one for the Bad! Disposable is for *worthless* objects, ones that are easy to replace, whose loss is barely noticed in the Land of the Living! But Bother-It's-Gone is for *special* Things. Every Thing in Bother-It's-Gone caused our humans a great deal of trouble when we were lost. We are valued. We are *important*. I, for instance," continued Addie, "spent fifty whole years in the possession of a lady Up There! She wrote the names and addresses and telephone numbers of her family and friends inside me. I was the only place she kept this important information!"

Addie flicked her pages and everyone saw the dense, spidery writing of the old lady.

"*Imagine* the trouble it caused when she lost me!"

Instead of looking sad, Addie burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"DP definitely isn't here," whispered Jack to the Christmas Pig. "Not if this is a place for Things that are glad they made their owners sad!"

A low voice spoke suddenly in Jack's ear, making him jump.

"One thing I must beg of you, dear laddie:

Please don't judge us all by horrid Addie."

Jack looked round. A grubby sheet of paper with eyes and a mouth doodled at the top had joined the walking tour.

As they all set off again, Jack asked the paper, "Who are you?"

"My name is Poem. See my scribbled lines?"

She unfurled slightly to show them the words scrawled across her.

"And as I'm verse, I only speak in rhymes."

"Oh," said Jack. "Have you just arrived here, too?"

"No, I've been here ages, but today

I thought I'd join the walking tour. I'll pay

A price for joining in, because you see

There's nobody old Addie hates, like me."

"Why does she hate you?" asked Jack.

"Because she's very mean and underhand,

And I'm not scared to say so, so I'm banned."

Sure enough, at that very moment, Addie, who'd just stopped outside a building with a little clocktower and double doors of polished wood, turned to talk to the crowd again and at once spotted Poem lurking at the back.

"Poem!" she cried. "Run along, now, dear, the mayor *told* you you're not allowed on my walking tours anymore!"

"Oh, sorry to intrude, that slipped my mind!" said Poem, grinning at Jack.

"Goodbye, dear, truthful Addie! You're so kind!"

Poem drifted away. Addie hitched her wide smile back onto her flowery face and said, "A little tip for newcomers: you should avoid Poem—she's mad, *quite* mad. And she lives with somebody even madder! I've been trying to get them both Adjusted to Disposable, but no luck so far. Now, I'm going to knock on the town hall's door, and if we're very lucky, the dear mayor will show us—"

But before Addie could knock, a square cheese grater came bursting out of the double doors, almost knocking Addie over. He was wearing a smart black tricorn mayor's hat, and behind him came an assortment of Loss Adjusters who looked slightly different to the usual kind. All wore black balaclavas, with the usual "L" badge on the forehead. Even though most of their faces were concealed, it was still easy to see what kind of Things they were. One was a magnifying glass, another was a net, and the third was an enormous hobnail boot.

"Oh no," whispered the Christmas Pig. "It's the Capture Team!"

"Trouble!" roared the mayor, who was brandishing a piece of paper. "The rumors are true! There are Things down here that shouldn't be! I've just received a description: a cuddly pig and an action figure in pajamas!"



MAYOR CHEESE GRATER

The mayor had barely finished saying “pajamas” when the Christmas Pig seized Jack’s arm and tugged him sideways up an alleyway. There being nowhere else to hide, the Christmas Pig snatched the lid off a shiny silver dustbin with the mayor’s coat of arms on it, and both he and Jack jumped inside, pulling the lid back over themselves. Jack was so scared it took him a moment to notice how very clean the empty dustbin was: apparently, even the insides of bins were regularly polished in Bother-It’s-Gone.

“Settle down, settle down!” they heard the mayor shout, because the crowd had begun talking loudly at his announcement. When there was

silence again, the mayor said, "Now, listen! That pig and action figure are breaking the law, and when the law gets broken, it gives the Loser an excuse to break the law back! Ten years ago, to this very day, the Loser came crashing into Bother-It's-Gone, kicking in the fronts of houses and lifting off roofs, and it's not going to happen again, not on my watch!"

"W-why did he come here last time?" said a terrified voice that Jack recognized as Lunchy's.

"Because the last mayor broke the law!" shouted the cheese grater. "Mayor Pinking Shears was her name! She felt sorry for Surplus, so she let some of it sneak off the Wastes to hide in our attics! The Loser got wind of what she was up to and he ran into town, smashing apart houses! He scooped up all the Surplus and ate it, and gobbled up a few Things that had done nothing wrong, as well, and last of all he grabbed Pinking Shears and took her off to his lair, screaming as she went, and she's never been seen again!

"That's when I became mayor," roared the cheese grater, "and from that moment on, the law's been kept! Once a week, the Loss Adjusters and I conduct a *thorough* search of this town, to make sure there's no Thing here that shouldn't be! Right, everyone go straight home, and no loitering! Addie will tell newcomers where their houses are—you're to stay indoors until I give the all clear!"

Jack and the Christmas Pig remained squashed up in the bin, which was a very tight fit, listening to the crowd dispersing.

"What if the gold watch tells them he saw us?" whispered Jack. "Or the poem? Or *Lunchy*?"

"Then we'll be in deep trouble," the Christmas Pig whispered back. "But they all seemed like good Things. Hopefully, they won't tell."

After a few minutes, the tramp of Things heading home had faded away. Now all that remained were the voices of the mayor and the Cap-

ture Team.

"They wouldn't be stupid enough to come right into the center of town," said the mayor confidently. "I suggest we spread out and work from the outside in."

The Capture Team agreed and they heard them moving away, calling to other Loss Adjusters to come and help search. The loudest noise of all came from the hobnailed boot, which made a menacing metal clunk with every step it took.

"That boot's name's Crusher," the Christmas Pig whispered in Jack's ear. "One of your socks told me about him. He's a favorite of the Loser's. Crusher's allowed to stamp all over Things if he catches them. After that, even if they're found, they're too broken to be of any use."

Jack slightly wished the Christmas Pig hadn't told him this.

"Did you hear what that watch started saying, before Addie stopped him?" the Christmas Pig went on.

"Yes," said Jack. "He came from a third town."

"Which makes sense," said the Christmas Pig, "because—"

"There were three doors in Mislaid!"

"Exactly," said the Christmas Pig.

"So DP must be in the last town!" said Jack.

"Yes, he must," said the Christmas Pig. "You know, I think our best hope is to try and sneak onto that train and hide, and let it take us to the other town. But we'll wait until dark. We've got no chance if we get out now."

And so they waited for nightfall.

At last, when they thought it was dark enough, they tried to get out of the bin, but somehow they'd become wedged in together. After a lot of wriggling, Jack managed to clamber out, and then he had to tug quite

hard on the Christmas Pig's trotters until he came free, and they both toppled over onto a pile of snow, the Christmas Pig on top of Jack.

"Thank you," panted the Christmas Pig. "Sorry about that. My beans had settled."

"It's okay," said Jack, who was now both chilly and wet again. He got up, brushed himself down, and they crept off in the direction of the station, making sure to keep to the shadows.

They'd only gone a short distance when the mayor's voice came booming suddenly over loudspeakers on every corner. "Attention, all Things! Attention, all Things! We believe the Surplus pig and action figure have moved into the center of town under cover of darkness! Bolt your doors! Shutter your windows! Anybody helping the Surplus will be given to the Loser!"

Everywhere Jack and the Christmas Pig looked, the jewel-bright patches of light from the curtained windows were blacked out, and they heard the clicks of hundreds of bolts being driven home. When Mayor Cheese Grater had repeated his warning a second time, a ringing silence fell over the town of Bother-It's-Gone. The Things that lived there seemed suddenly too scared even to talk inside their own houses.

Jack's breath made a cloud of mist in the icy air as they stole ever closer to the station. Shivering, he realized he'd left his blanket behind in the mayor's bin, but all he cared about now was getting out of Bother-It's-Gone, which no longer felt a friendly, cozy place at all.

The station was in sight, just across the road, when they heard a rough voice up ahead. The Christmas Pig pulled Jack into a dark doorway and Jack held his breath, so the mist wouldn't give them away.

"You four—follow Spyglass to the western section. You lot—go with Net and search the east. The rest of you, follow me."

Jack heard the Loss Adjusters setting off in different directions, and again, the loudest noise of all was the stomping of the gigantic hobnail boot called Crusher.

When at last the sounds had died away once more, Jack and the Christmas Pig crept out of their hiding place and headed into the station.

But all Jack's hopes were dashed: the toy train had gone.

"Oh no—now what?" Jack whispered through his chattering teeth.

"Now," said a low menacing voice right behind them, "*it's crushing time.*"



CRUSHER

Jack and the Christmas Pig whirled around and at once, Jack realized that Crusher the hobnail boot had tricked them: he'd stamped in place to make them think he'd gone away. The boot came hopping nearer, and he was soon so close that Jack could see how two of his shoelace holes had become cruel little eyes. As the nails in his sole glinted in the moonlight, Jack thought suddenly of Mum. If he were stamped on and broken by Crusher, he'd never see her again. Without realizing what he was doing, Jack reached out and grabbed the Christmas Pig's trotter.

"Wait!" the Christmas Pig begged Crusher, gripping Jack's hand in return.

"What for?" sneered the boot, hopping nearer.

"For . . . for the thing that's about to happen!" said the Christmas Pig.

"What thing?" growled Crusher.

"The thing," said the Christmas Pig, "that will change everything! You won't want to miss it! Wait—just wait—"

And then, to Jack's utter amazement, a shaft of golden light suddenly fell from the dark sky above, so that Crusher stood in a spotlight. The boot froze, then tried to escape the light, but it was no use: the column of gold began dragging him upward toward the Land of the Living.

"How did you do that?" Jack gasped to the Christmas Pig.

"I didn't!" said the pig, looking quite as stunned as Jack felt. "But sometimes waiting works!"

"Crusher's been found!" they heard one of the Loss Adjusters cry from a neighboring street.

"They're here!" yelled the boot, struggling furiously to escape the column of light carrying him higher and higher over the snowy rooftops. "They're *here*, right beside the st—"

But his voice was drowned out by the other Loss Adjusters, who were shouting congratulations at their old friend.

"Good for you, Crusher!"

"We'll miss you, old chum!"

"Happy booting, buddy!"

"Never mind the fond farewells!" shouted the grating voice of the mayor. "Keep searching—we've got Surplus to catch!"

Jack and the Christmas Pig had just started to run up the nearest dark street when a dim light appeared to their left. A door had flown open, and an urgent voice said:

"Quickly! Come inside—you'll thank me later!"

We can hide you—”



POEM AND PRETENSE

Without pausing to consider whether it was sensible to obey the voice or not, Jack and the Christmas Pig hurtled through the open door, which closed behind them.

“—from that dreadful grater!” finished Poem.

The hall of the house was dimly lit. Poem's scribbled lines were barely visible.

“You aren't going to give us to the Loser, are you?” Jack whispered.

“What kind of traitor do you take me for?”

You needed help, so I opened my door!”